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Epilogue—reflections on cultural responsiveness

Päivi Palojoki

This anthology is based on the pedagogical dialogue started during the Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) project from 2012 to 2015. The various network activities gave opportunities for students, teachers and teacher educators to exchange ideas and peer review good practices in partner universities. This anthology serves the purpose of distributing the gained experiences and findings and bringing these back to the learning communities of the participants.

Our cooperation was inspired by the global changes that affect school systems and educational structures all over the world. We were all in our respective countries meeting diversity in its various forms, which challenges contemporary education. This diversity requires teachers to be more and more culturally aware and responsive, to know about various cultural orientations and to act meaningfully within a culturally heterogeneous group of learners. Contemporary and future teachers need the knowledge and skills to not only understand the cultural heterogeneity that exists in classrooms but also to act meaningfully in classroom situations and in cooperation with parents. This places new demands on the development of teacher education and the organisation and contents of in-service teacher education as well as on the pedagogical leadership in various countries.

This anthology and our CRE project has been inspired by the seminal work of Geneva Gay (2000). In her book (Gay, 2000) about the theory, research and practice of culturally responsive teaching, she claims the following:

The knowledge that teachers need to have about cultural diversity goes beyond mere awareness of, respect for, and general recognition of the fact that ethnic groups have different values or express similar values in various ways. Thus, the second requirement for developing a knowledge base for culturally responsive teaching is acquiring detailed factual information about the cultural particularities of specific ethnic groups. This is needed to make schooling more interesting and stimulating for, representative of, and responsive to ethnically diverse students. There is a place for cultural diversity in every subject taught in schools.

However, diversity is not only due to ethnic variety, and therefore her term ‘cultural diversity’ reflects our thoughts better than ethnicity in this anthology. At this point, there is also a need to reflect on our understanding of globalisation. Teaching and learning practices in different countries have been shaped throughout history by the experience of globalisation (Lavia & Sikes, 2010). In this anthology, several articles stem from countries which have a colonial history. The independence and aspirations to develop intellectually free school environments need critical discussion on issues such as historicity, reflexivity, relationality, positionality and criticality. This leads to operationalised questions which are critical in every country: who has the right to access education (Posti-Ahokas, 2014)? Who is missing and why? Whose voices get the right to provide the dominant discourses (Lehtomäki, Janhonen-Abuquah, Tuomi, Okkolin, Posti-Ahokas & Palojoki, 2014)? How are the students experiencing globalisation in their personal and professional lives?

The effects of globalisation are also discussed in this anthology in the light of politics. The personal and professional aspects of education have become political, and researchers and teachers should be aware of these premises. Increasingly more relevant questions need to be reflected upon. Whose aspirations are to be realised while developing schools and teacher education? Whose contexts and living conditions are to be prioritised (Posti-Ahokas & Palojoki, 2013)? These haunting thoughts do not leave even researchers in peace. In whose service do academics and researchers work?

These issues have been discussed and reflected upon in the various personal and group meetings of the CRE project. The experiences gained during exchange study visits and joint research projects are more valuable than ever. The possibility of fathoming one’s own profession practised in another cultural context allows us to learn more about ourselves and the teaching profession and thus develop both further. In the following, I use Gay’s (2010) definition of the ‘Five dimensions of culturally responsive education’ in order to give examples of how her perspectives are visible in the articles of this anthology.

Table 1. Examples of how the dimensions of culturally responsive education (Gay, 2000) are reflected in this anthology.

Culturally responsive teaching is...	Definition by Gay (2000)	Example of article in this anthology	Key notions of the article
... validating	..using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them	Janhonen-Abruquah et al.: Towards Contextual Understanding of Gender: Teacher Students' Views on Home Economics Education and Gender in Ghana and Finland	Gender inequality is recognised as a critical societal problem and therefore discussed in relation to education policy, including setting targets for equal access and enrolment for males and females.
... comprehensive	..teaching the whole child, culturally responsive teachers realize not only the importance of academic achievement, but also the maintaining of cultural identity and heritage	Ghartey Ampiah et al.: Implementing the Language of Instruction Policy in a Complex Linguistic Context in Ghana	The use of the mother tongue makes the curriculum more relevant by connecting the learning to the pupil's experience, environment and culture. The linguistic heterogeneity of the many school contexts discussed in this anthology is great. It is important to know how educators manage to tackle this challenge.
... multi-dimensional	.. applies versatile curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional	Kahangwa: Developing Knowledge-Based Economy through Education in the Global South: Whose	Hegemonic cultures are not necessarily appropriate especially for countries in the global South, which are still challenged to make their education systems stable, strengthen their economies and

	techniques, and performance assessments	Model and Culture Matters?	make a significant contribution in an increasingly multicultural global society.
... empowering	.. emphasizing critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change; students must believe they can succeed in learning tasks and have motivation to persevere	Komba: Educational Leaders' Views on Economically-disadvantaged Families' Beliefs regarding the Relevance of Primary and Secondary Schooling in Tanzania	Families should not be taken as an empty vacuum to be fed with policy-makers' knowledge. Arguably, involving families may contribute much to the provision of culturally responsive education.
... trans-formative	...helping students to develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, political, and economic action	Adu-Yeboah: Motives and Motivations for Mature Women's Participation in Higher Education in Ghana	The old view of men choosing women with little education in order to 'control' them needs to be challenged. However, educated men here urged their wives to obtain HE probably so as to match up to their modernised, urbanised lifestyle. Both as fathers and husbands, the change in the men's attitude about female education is a process of de-traditionalisation.
...emanci-patory	...guiding students in understanding that no single version of 'truth' is total and permanent; acceptance of knowledge as something to be continuously shared,	Mohlakhwana & Aluko: Teacher Professional Development through Open Distance Learning: Introducing a new learning culture	If educators are to meet the demands of the society in the 21 st century, there is a need to unlearn old skills and learn new ones in all levels of the school system.

	critiqued, revised, and renewed		
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The need to ensure that basic education is accessible, understandable and compulsory for all is discussed in many of the articles. These articles confirm that education is a vital tool in the war against poverty. As Komba states in her article, in all of the educational policies and programmes, education is cited as a means of combatting the three national arch enemies: poverty, ignorance and disease. Yet the education sector is still experiencing a number of challenges, including truancy, dropout and poor learning outcomes as well as unequal gender policies, whereby many children complete primary schooling without acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Komba discusses the reasons for dropping out in South African schools and concludes that the majority of children who are dropping out of school may be from economically disadvantaged families. Hence, it may be assumed that children from economically disadvantaged families are more likely to remain trapped in the cycle of poverty. Adding the notions of Garthey Ampiah et al. the picture might be more complex, as it is also related to the language used in the classroom. Using English as a shared language for all requires understanding from parents. They should encourage their children's schooling and advise them to read and work hard at school.

As stated earlier in Posti-Ahokas's (2014) dissertation, parents' reluctance to support their children could be explained by their ignorance regarding the future benefits of education for their children and the community. This is especially true for girls, who need support for carrying on with their schooling. Interestingly, in Western countries like Finland, gender issues might actually disfavour boys. As Janhonen-Abruquah et al. discuss, here schools may design learning environments disfavours boys and discouraging their achievement. Gender issues should be more openly discussed both ways: shedding light on undiscussed gender roles and dismantling the existing barriers.

Many articles in this anthology emphasise the importance of collaboration between educational leaders, teachers and families in improving the quality, cultural responsiveness and, thus, the overall relevance of schooling. As Komba argues, families should not be taken as an empty vacuum to be fed with policy-makers' knowledge. Involving families contributes much to the provision of culturally responsive education.

Adu-Yeboah reminds readers that in many African countries, there is a strong division of labour backed by prevailing attitudes, which nurture in males and females the belief that 'it is the woman

who cooks the meals and generally sees to it that the house is clean and well-kept'. Men, on the other hand, are supposed to be heads of households and breadwinners and cater for all household members, including their wives. The assumption is that whereas men need higher income to discharge these responsibilities, which is possible by obtaining education, women's role does not require formal education to perform. However, this issue is also arising in high-income countries, too: both men and women without higher education are perceived to be dependent on welfare services. In this status, and in the broader socio-cultural context, they are in danger of being stamped as lazy and feckless, a drain on public resources and not exemplary for their children. As Adu-Yeobah reminds, for these people, higher education may be essential for them to enhance their job prospects and earning capacity and make them financially stable.

Curriculum, the school system and the qualifications of teacher education are powerful tools through which the politicians can use their power to favour their own interests. There are many examples of countries who have struggled for their freedom from past oppressive political systems. For example, in Europe, the Baltic countries got their freedom from the Soviet rule in the 1990s, and in these countries, teacher education has faced different periods and authorities that have altered it in accordance with the political and social landscape (Taar, 2015; Paas, 2015). Changes in the teaching profession and teacher education require time, as changes do not happen overnight, and the results of such changes often became evident only after the graduates apply their skills and knowledge into practice. In this anthology, Mohlakhwana and Aluko present a similar story put into the historical context of South Africa. According to them, it would take centuries to train teachers solely through the conventional mode of education. Therefore the education of in-service teachers and the tools provided by open-distance learning (ODL) have become valuable. They have noticed a very general phenomenon, applicable to all educational systems: if teachers are to meet the demands of society in the 21st century, there is a need to unlearn old skills and learn new ones. In this context, the inner motivation of teachers and teacher students is essential. They formulate the new culture of learning as comprising two elements: the ability to learn alone and the motivation to learn from others and imagination and play as fuel-sustaining learning. School can catalyse the changes in the society wherever there are working teachers' positive attitudes and their desire to make a difference (Paas, 2015).

Political desires are also linked into the rules of the language/s used in schools. In this anthology, Garthey Ampiah et al. conclude that many teachers in Ghana have communication challenges with the children due to factors such as children or teachers not understanding the language of the community, a lack of textbooks to facilitate learning in the local language and classes being multilingual, leading to the marginalisation of some children. The practice of adopting the dominant

language of the community is not culturally sensitive to the language of some of the children, especially when there are children who do not speak or understand the dominant language.

Adhiambo Puhakka states in her article that a multilingual society can also have positive effects and be seen as having value in and of itself. Multilingualism at a personal level always implies some degree of fluency in more than one variety. Her example of a multilingual country in Sub-Saharan Africa is Kenya. She notes that conflicts from diversity can be productive when people strive to understand one another, opening up new business opportunities and markets, by widening the customer base and by being able to better address specific consumers' needs in the multicultural society. She has purposefully avoided using the term 'challenges' in her article with regard to culture and language diversity, because she sees this multilingual diversity as a rich resource that should be preserved and understood. If adapted wisely into the school system, multilingualism acts as a rich resource in providing meaningful comparative learning in any society and across the globe.

However, the use of language is always related to ways new knowledge is created: if the distance between 'academic language/s' and 'everyday language/s' is too large, the country loses part of its developmental potential. In his article, Kahangwa takes the idea of culturally responsive education to argue that the consideration of the cultural environment/context (internal and external) that surrounds higher education in a certain country well suits its efforts to develop a knowledge based economy (KBE). According to him, hegemonic cultures are not necessarily appropriate, especially for countries in the global South, which are still challenged to make their education systems stable, strengthen their economies and make a significant contribution in an increasingly multicultural global society. Neoliberalism has brought aspects of marketisation and/or commercialisation into the academic world. Ideas of entrepreneurial universities and academic capitalism have greatly influenced higher education in many European countries and in the USA. Based on Tanzanian experiences, Kahangwa reminds that in the global South, the commercialisation of university research has been taken up in educational policies and practices that support the development of KBE. A shift can be seen from considering research results (knowledge) as a public good to a private one, bearing a commercial value. He wisely warns that if countries in the global South continue to take a neoliberal approach to developing a knowledge based economy, they will be adopting a Western culture. It is now seen in European countries, and in Finland as well, that highly skilled countries can be brain-drained, as is manifested in the exodus numbers versus incoming 'brains' in different countries. The innovative and intellectual use of knowledge is a supportive factor of production in all economic sectors and is a base in some sectors which are not engaged in the extraction and processing of natural resources and production of consumer goods but rather in the provision of services, the processing of information, the search for further knowledge and the

distribution of the same. If universities forget this basic rule, the neoliberal and capitalist values will take the helm instead of human capacity building: for the successful development of KBE in a country, being mindful of the cultural context is extremely significant.

This anthology also includes articles addressing issues related to research methodology. The aim of these articles is to inspire researchers', lecturers' and teachers' pedagogical thinking and lead to new educational innovations, which, in turn, will equip future schools to respond to the challenges of a changing society and culture. Holm and Lehtomäki remind the readers that the issues of understanding and including diverse voices and views in educational development are more important than ever before due to pertaining inequity, insecurity and unequal power structures in many countries. They emphasise that in education, culture is always present and embedded in contents, activities and communication styles. However, researchers should become better aware and understand their own standpoint as well as how to approach and be close to the culture of those people they work with or study. They often face unequal power relations, which can be local and/or global. They draw examples from the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, where especially in rural areas, younger people are to respect older persons, and girls are expected to be silent and obedient. It is a challenge for researchers to capture the experiences and views of those traditionally 'silenced' in the patriarchal culture, where boys and their education are more valued.

Alsudins and Pillay reach personal levels of narration in their article exploring how culturally situated narrative writing serves as a methodological tool for meaning making across cultures. They demand that readers be involved in their own acts of cultural construction and meaning making while reading of the experiences of the supervisor-doctoral student relationship. Even though the sample size (four) is small, the in-depth conversations conducted draw an interesting picture of various cross-cultural barriers and stories of how to overcome them.

Salminen et al. describe music education students' experiences from the MECI-network (Music, Education & Cultural Identity), coordinated by the Department of Music of the University of Jyväskylä. Opportunities were created where the participants could share in music making and also where they could take part in critical discussions and seminars with researchers—both experienced experts and young scholars—from Africa and Finland. Their conclusions emphasise the same experiences shared from other North – South – South projects, too: the project activities have played a significant role in the participants' lives and the participants have been able to create long-lasting personal relationships with the others. Music is a shared language, and the possibilities of cultural encounters are limitless.

Pirttimaa et al. discuss in their article how dialogues on inclusive education from different cultures could be embedded in culturally responsive education. Inclusive education with an emphasis on the right to education and child rights for every child is not self-evident. Much needs to be done in order to make equity, equality and human rights realised at every level of the educational system. There needs to be more dialogue showing the need for culturally sensitive inclusion. Through this, a common understanding could be created with respect to the variety in resources and educational values. Ensuring the participation of both men and women, students and teachers, persons with and without disabilities offered the learning community the experience of inclusion in practice, in addition to the sharing of knowledge. Accessible learning and collaboration environments, such as ICT and open information, research literature and data bases, were appreciated by the project participants. These are the essential aspects of universal design and ensuring inclusive education.

In summary, this anthology brings together some of the important issues discussed during the various activities accomplished in our North-South-South network. And, as stated previously in the introduction to this anthology: ‘Culturally responsive education is not only a phenomenon under study but also a part of the authors’ daily work’. The international cooperation involved in exchange study visits and joint research projects is today more valuable than ever. Our stories told here confirm that culturally responsive teaching is emancipatory and can, as Gay (2000) has stated, lead into improved achievements, including clear and insightful thinking; more caring, concerned and humane interpersonal skills; better understanding of interconnections among individual, local, national, ethnic, global and human identities; and acceptance of knowledge as something to be continuously shared, critiqued, revised and renewed.

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